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Explanation of school administrators' problem solving skills with their personality traits, emotional intelligence and emphatic tendency

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to develop a predictive model for explanation of the problem solving skills of school administrators. School management process composes of students, educational activities, teachers, families and important problems arising from social environment. School administrators are expected to create accurate, rapid, effective and accepted solutions for the problems they encountered depending on their corporate visions and school development programs. The research has been conducted over data acquired from 308 administrators working in official state schools through descriptive method. Research data were obtained by means of Problem Solving Skills Scale, Five-factor Personality Scale, Emphatic Tendency Scale, Emotional Intelligence Scale and Personal Details Form prepared. Data were analyzed via SPSS/Windows 17.0 package program. 308 administrators' data of which pre-analyses were performed and which are suitable for use were dealt with descriptive, correlation and linear, multi-directional regression analysis. As a result of analysis, a mean and higher level correlation was found between problem solving skills and personality traits depending on five-factor classification, emphatic tendency and emotional intelligence. Regression analysis results revealed that 6 different problem solving skills of administrators were predicted by research variables and model was explained at a significant level. Research findings were discussed within the scope of school management process, administrator training, school development projects.

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Keywords: School Management, Problem Solving, Personality traits

1. Introduction

People should develop adaptation skills such as decision-making and generating solutions for the problems they encounter within constantly changing and developing situations throughout their lives and organizational duties. Decision-making and problem solving skills of school principals as leaders of the school faculty are exposed to the effect of various abilities and personal traits (Bursalıoglu, 2005). In different researches it was revealed that there was a relationship between problem solving skills of principals and school management strategies, emotional intelligence, five-factor personality, empathy, communication skills and abilities, persuasion skills, flexibility, being

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open to changes, emotional and cognitive awareness and aptness to sympathize with other's feelings and thoughts and school management strategies of principals (Bridge, 2003; Demirkan, 2006; Mount et al., 1998).

It is noted in the literature that the most effective leaders demonstrate emotional intelligence during their interactions and good leaders, thus, need a board range of leadership styles. For example they must be able to manage their emotions as well as emotions of others since several studies explain that emotional competencies which are important for success and the ability to modulate emotions are also of importance to leaders (Cooper, 1997). Staying calm and composed is an important attribute and influences other people. In addition, optimism allows leaders to persist in the face of challenges. Strong initiative, persuasiveness, and achievement motivation also hallmark good leaders. Good leaders have strong visions and they are aware of the climate and current reality for which their leaderships are required. Good leaders also display emotional leadership and are also able to create good personal relations with other people and have a talent for providing explanations or solutions which will satisfy persons in dispute. It was their feeling that effective communication and active listening were very important as they worked through the various people problems associated with the job and as a matter of fact that the interpersonal skill of empathy appeared to be important when dealing with people in more than IQ (Goleman, 1995).

When it comes to improving organizational effectiveness, management scholar and practitioners are beginning to emphasize the importance of a manager's emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence represents a set of dispositional attributes (self-awareness, self motivation, empathy, and relationship management) for monitoring one's own and others' feeling, beliefs, and internal state in order to provide useful information to guide one's and others' thinking and action (Brearly, 2000).

Another important aspect of organizational effectiveness is problem solving ability of administrators. Problem solving is a capacity that school principals use on a daily basis. The ability to understand and accurately perceive the problems presented to them is vital in the work of a principal. The administrators all acknowledge that their jobs were stressful and each of them spoke of the importance of taking care of themselves and dealing with the stress so that it did not overwhelm them. Each administrator spoke of having ways of dealing with the stress of the job, and they all had strategies that worked for them. Administrators also suggested that the most important four skills needed to be a school principal were those of emotional intelligence abilities: Interpersonal, intrapersonal, problem solving and stress management (Lowe et al., 1995; Mullins, 2000; Mount et al., 1998).

When evaluated for principals it is noted that emotional intelligence will affect behaviors such as identifying skills and limits concerning emotional intelligence, re-structuring emotionally and cognitively, understanding attitude taking, ability to use motivation in team-works, purposefulness and determination. Personalities can be analyzed correlating with emotional intelligence in the management process of realistic monitoring of feelings and problems and management skills. It is known that development of competences regarding emotional intelligence affects professional performance, job satisfaction and personal thoughts on the atmosphere of the workplace perceived give rise to results such as job satisfaction and exhaustion (Cote & Miners, 2006 ; Mayer et al., 1999). It was found that principal' interest and problem solving skills towards school climate and relationships between students and officers within the school support job satisfaction and motivation affirmatively for students and teachers. Within the scope of the research, it is seen important that relevant variables can be analyzed evaluating this case.

2. Methodology

2.1. Sample

This research is carried out based on descriptive method. The data of the research was selected among public school principals with minimum seven-year professional experience of five-year teaching and minimum 2-year management. Evaluation tools used for the research were applied to totally 308 school principals out of five different provinces and educational regions. While 286 (92 %) of the participants are comprised of men, women comprise the remaining 22 (8%). Average Age was determined as 42.9 (Ss= 6.12).

2.2. Instrument

2.2.1. Five-Factor Personality Scale: Adaptation of short version which was adapted into Turkish was carried out by Bacanlı (2007). In the factor analysis performed for the structural validity of the scale, 40 capacity partners were determined to measure five-factor personality dimension. Dimensions acquired explained 52.6 % of the variance pertaining to the Five-Factor Personality. It was seen that coefficient of general internal consistency of the scale varied between .73 and .89.

2.2.2. Emotional Intelligence Scale: It was developed by Hall (1999) and Turkish adaptation thereof was carried out by Ergin (2000). The scale is a likert-type measuring tool with five sub-dimensions including awareness of feelings, management of feelings, self-motivation, empathy and controlling relations.

2.2.3. Interpersonal Reactivity Scale (IRS): The scale developed by Davis (1983) was called as “perspective taking”, “fantasy”, “empathic concern” and “personal distress” of persons with emphatic sensitivity. IRS has 5-point likert-type rating.

2.2.4. Problem Solving Skills Scale: This scale was adapted into Turkish through an application performed on the university students by Sahin and Heppner (1993). The scale composes of 6 factors including impulsive approach, reflective approach, avoidant approach, monitoring approach, confidence approach, playfulness approach.

2. 3. Data analysis: Data have been analyzed via packaged software of SPSS/Windows17.0. Initially correlation among data was examined. In the second stage, data have been analyzed by means of Linear Multi-directional Regression Analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

In the pre-analyses of the data performed via Pearson Moments Multiplication correlation technique, medium level significant relations and above were detected. Regression analysis results pertaining to the variables which were evaluated that the variables predicted problem solving skills of principals were provided in Table – 1.

Table 1. Predictor regression analysis findings of principals monitoring PSS

Model	Variable	B	β	t	Partial r	Paired r	R	R ²	F
I		14.26		12.62**			.58	.29	67.25***
	EX	.69	.42	7.44***	.48	.19			
	AG	1.68	.27	6.67***	.34	.13			
	CO	.36	.17	5.63***	.39	.14			
	NE	.06	.12	.78	.12	.11			
II	OE	.28	.18	4.15***	.45	.13			
		1.32		9.32***			.49	.24	52.23***
	AF	.77	.48	9.38***	.48	.40			
	MF	.08	.02	.78	.07	.06			
	SM	.18	.27	3.40**	.29	.27			
III	E	.69	.24	5.44***	.39	.14			
	CR	.08	.11	.97	.10	.09			
		3.11		8.11***			.45	.22	48.01***
	PT	1.08	.18	4.23***	.34	.15			
	F	.02	.02	.26	.03	.02			
	EC	.21	.17	2.99**	.45	.11			
	PD	.29	.14	4.31***	.40	.12			

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

EX: Extroversion; AG: Agreeableness; CO: Conscientiousness; NE: Neuroticism; OE: Openness to Experience; AF: Awareness of feelings; MF: Management of feelings; SM: self-motivation; E: Empathy; CR: Controlling relations; PT: Perspective taking; F: Fantasy; EC: Empathic concern; PD: Personal distress.

Linear multi dimensional regression analysis was performed in order to reveal five-factor personality model, interpersonal reactivity and emotional intelligence scores of monitoring problem solving skills (PSS) of principals. When analyzed the table, it is evidently seen that five-factor personality model explains averagely 29% of the PSS variable. It is seen that PSS explanatory ratio of interpersonal reactivity scores is 24% and emotional intelligence variability explanatory variance is 22 %. According to the regression coefficient standardized (β) relative order of importance of predictor variables on PSS is AF, EX, AG, SM, E, PT, OE, CO, EC, PD factors. When analyzed t-test results regarding the regression coefficient significance, it was revealed that three variables of the models and equation formed were significant.

4. Conclusion

It was founded that five-factor personality of principals was predicted by interpersonal reactivity and emotional intelligence. Problem solving skills of principals are affected by situational factors. However, decision making is related to overcoming and re-structuring solution cognitive process, managerial strategies, personal traits and emotional intelligence (Antonioni, 1998). The results of the research support this finding. Especially, being extrovert, self-discipline and openness to experience personal traits is predicted PSS in this context. It was revealed that there was a positive relationship between having open feelings, introversion/extroversion, lack of adaptation, reconciliation, sensitivity towards interpersonal relations and control skills and conflict in school management, and PSS. As a result of the research, data concerning the personal traits brought out that it exhibited similar predictor relationships.

Correlation and explanatory variability seen between neurotic characteristics and self-discipline and perspective taking demonstrates that stimulating anxiety which principal have at a specific level may contribute to management styles positively. It can be evaluated that emphatic attitudes, PSS and tendencies to understand thoughts-feelings prevent principals' neurotic tendencies towards school management process to turn into a negative form (Cooper, 1997).

EQ is called among the most prominent traits of principals. EQ is related to principals' feelings, self-awareness, keeping their determinations concerning their thoughts, acts and willingness high. (Hogan et al., 1994; Lowe, 1995). Predictor relationship observed particularly among PSS and PT, EC, E revealed significant relations in respect of being emphatic and realizing thoughts, understanding feelings at the course of cognitive monitoring in ranging manager-managing person, and decision-making process.

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